**Peer-review report of**

Morton, T.A. & Salvatore, J. (2026). When it doesn't get better: Leaning into minoritized identity to brace for decline. *advances.in/psychology, 1*, e186113. https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00056

**Round 1**

**Editor Decision**

Dear Authors,

We thank you for submitting your manuscript, "When it doesn't get better: Leaning into minoritized identity to brace for decline," for consideration in our special issue on The Psychology of Pushback. We have reviewed your work independently and have also received insightful commentary from two scholars with core expertise in this field. Their constructive, focused, and detailed feedback, in conjunction with our own editorial assessment, has been integral to our decision.

All of us who reviewed your manuscript (the two reviewers and the two editors of the Special Issue) appreciated the many significant strengths of your manuscript. Reviewer 1 writes, "the topic is certainly timely, given the increased attacks on LGBTQ+ rights both within the U.S. and internationally. The manuscript is well-written, and I appreciate the focus on temporal dynamics of social change. The theoretical framing around social identity theory and the rejection-identification model is also appropriate. Overall, there is a lot to like about this work." Reviewer 2 similarly emphasizes the positive aspects of your work, noting that it "presents a compelling and timely investigation into how sexual minority individuals respond to perceived social decline through increased identification with their community. The study is grounded in solid theoretical frameworks and leverages a unique longitudinal dataset spanning eight years." We agree with both positive assessments.

Notwithstanding these strengths, both reviewers identified several limitations requiring careful attention. Their feedback converges on several key areas, which align with our own editorial assessment. We therefore invite you to submit a revised manuscript that thoroughly addresses these concerns. The reviewers have offered considerable and thoughtful feedback; while we ask that you respond to each of their points, we will not reiterate them here. Instead, we wish to highlight the overarching issues that we, in agreement with the reviewers, deem most critical for revision.

A primary area for revision concerns the manuscript's introduction. It requires substantial development to: (a) provide the necessary socio-historical context for the time frame of your studies; (b) incorporate a more comprehensive literature review; (c) temper your critiques of existing experimental and cross sectional work (for the reasons articulated by Reviewer 1); (d) introduce the focal constructs, justifying their selection and, critically, the theoretical rationale for their roles as mediators versus outcomes; and (e) conclude by preparing the reader for the nature of the longitudinal data (cross-sectional over several timepoints rather than within-person), the specific research questions to be addressed, and the general analytical approach.

We commend you for your transparency regarding the experimental design. We recommend integrating select portions of the Supplementary Online Material into the main text, such as the following: “This prediction was grounded in assumptions that social change was becoming so positive that this may be undermining the ongoing value and relevance of the group. This assumption was violated by the trajectory of social change we observed over successive iterations of the experiment. This guided our decision to engage with the across time changes instead of the originally focal experimental effects.”

Critically, because each wave is a repeated cross-section with new participants and included an experimental manipulation, the manuscript needs to establish whether the manipulation altered the observed time patterns on any post-manipulation outcomes. At present you document some manipulation effects in SOM but do not report Condition × Wave tests, which leaves open the possibility that time results reflect varying treatment effects rather than between-wave differences. Please state explicitly that identification was measured before random assignment and cannot be affected by condition, so moderation by condition is not applicable for that variable. For all post-manipulation outcomes, estimate models of Outcome ~ Wave + Condition + Wave×Condition + controls, report the interaction, and characterize time trends accordingly. As robustness check, re-estimate time effects controlling for condition and within the control arm only, and visualize marginal means by wave within each condition with 95% CIs. If interactions are non-significant, say so in Results, justify collapsing across condition in the main text, and place the full models in the Supplement; if any interactions are significant, present condition-specific time effects and revise the narrative to condition on treatment status.

Furthermore, as the Reviewers acknowledge, the time-series analyses should control for additional demographic variables (e.g., SES, specific sexual orientation, gender identity beyond a binary). To provide more nuanced insights, we request that you also present the time-series data disaggregated by subgroups within the LGBTQ+ category.

The reliability of one key variable is below acceptable thresholds, necessitating its exclusion or, alternatively, the creation of a subscale from the two items with strong inter-item correlation.

Analyzing correlations across time points is informative; however, a more compelling analysis would investigate whether the correlates of perceived social decline themselves change over time. This hypothesis could be formally tested using multi-level models (e.g., by evaluating random effects), though other analytical approaches may also be suitable.

While the mediation analyses are compelling, several methodological questions persist. The non-uniform intervals between time points raise questions about the appropriateness of treating time as a linear variable; please clarify how this was coded and discuss the potential limitations it imposes. Clarity is needed regarding the estimates presented in Table 4. Please provide standardized effect sizes, 95% Confidence Intervals, and exact *p*-values for all key statistics. It is also unclear why a

path from Perceived Social Change (PSC) to Identification (ID) is included if these were modeled as parallel mediators. Critically, the table does not appear to report the indirect effects. From a standpoint of parsimony and statistical rigor, we strongly recommend conducting these analyses within a single Structural Equation Model (SEM) with all dependent variables entered simultaneously. This would allow for the presentation of fit indices for a single model rather than for seven separate models (for which no *F*-statistics or equivalent are provided). This model should be presented visually as a figure, with all paths displaying standardized beta coefficients, 95% CIs, and exact p-values. A corresponding table could then be dedicated exclusively to the standardized indirect and total effects.

In addition to these larger revisions, please address the following specific points, along with those raised by the reviewers:

INTRODUCTION

Your introduction focuses on the association between social change and social identity. Given that change can be either beneficial or detrimental to a group, we encourage greater attention to the *direction* of change in both your theoretical arguments and your review of the literature. For instance, you state, “For example, some work shows that activating perceptions of social change (i.e., instability in the social system) reduces perceptions of discrimination resulting in lower levels of identification among minoritized groups (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2009; Spoor & Schmitt, 2011).” A critical follow-up question is whether one would expect social identification to *increase* if this change entailed greater discrimination. You allude to this under "The Current Research," but this point should be integrated more centrally into your theoretical framework.

This point also extends to the Methods and Results sections, where, as Reviewer 2 notes, there is an inconsistency in how you describe this key variable. Specifically, the terms “Perceived decline” and “Perceived social change” appear to be used interchangeably, although they imply distinct operationalizations.

METHODS

For each measure, please describe the scale format, provide one example item, and report the scale reliability estimate in the main text, preferably within distinct, headed subsections.

The self-definition scale appears to comprise two items that refer not to the self but to perceived intragroup similarities. Please provide a conceptual justification for this operationalization. Statistically, do these items load onto a single factor?

The emotion measure is described in the main text as assessing feelings about “positive social change, i.e., improvements in the direction of equality for sexual minorities.” However, the item prompts refer more broadly to perceived changes regarding “what is happening around sexual identities” and “changes that are happening around the LGBTQ+ community.” These concepts, while related, are not

synonymous, and the current description lacks precision.

Please add a dedicated analysis section that outlines the analytical strategy and its rationale, the exact models tested, and the software packages and libraries utilized. Provide the code and data in SOM for transparency.

To prevent ambiguity, please consistently label the “Group based affect” variable as “Positive group based affect.”

RESULTS

Please visualize the trends currently reported in Table 2 using a figure with 95% CIs to make the patterns more accessible to the reader. The table could then be used to present the *F*-test statistics and the precise statistics for the planned contrasts (which alternatively could also be reported in-text). Ensure that this visualization depicts both the overall pattern and the patterns disaggregated by subgroup, as requested earlier.

STYLISTIC ISSUES

Table 3 is referred to and presented before Table 2. Please renumber the tables to reflect their chronological relevance in the text.

Ensure that all heading levels and their capitalization conform to APA 7th edition style guidelines.

Please format all tables according to APA 7th edition standards.

In summary, we believe this manuscript possesses considerable promise, a potential that is not yet fully realized in its current form. We therefore invite you to submit a revised version that addresses the points outlined above and by the Reviewers. The revisions we are requesting involve substantive aspects of your work that can affect the results and interpretation of the meaning of those findings. Thus, we cannot predict the outcome of the revise and review, but we would not have invited you to revise the work unless we believed that an appropriately revised version of the work could merit publication in this journal. In recognition that these revisions will necessitate a longer manuscript, we have increased the word limit for your submission by 2,000 words. Please submit your revision by October 31, 2025. Should you require an extension to this deadline, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Best,

Jonas R. Kunst & John F. Dovidio

**Reviewer 1**

Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript “When it doesn’t get better: Leaning into minoritized identity to brace for decline”. In this study, the author(s) argue that perceptions of declining social conditions may foster group identification among minority group members, indirectly reducing the negative outcomes of (perceived) social decline. They test this proposition using five cross-sectional samples collected during a time of considerable social change for LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. (2017-2025). Results revealed an increase in downward perceptions of social change and upward identification with the LGBTQ+ community, and that identification mediated the relationship between perceived social decline and core psychological responses to disadvantage (e.g., collective affect and efficacy). The author(s) conclude with considerations for future research examining how and when people respond to perceived social decline over time.

I read this manuscript with great interest—the topic is certainly timely, given the increased attacks on LGBTQ+ rights both within the U.S. and internationally. The manuscript is well-written, and I appreciate the focus on temporal dynamics of social change. The theoretical framing around social identity theory and the rejection-identification model is also appropriate. Overall, there is a lot to like about this work. That said, I have some suggestions for further improving the manuscript.

**Introduction:**

- First, the manuscript would benefit from further contextual information about conditions for LGBTQ+ people in the U.S.; page 3 provides a brief comment to say that the recent period is characterised by pushback, and page 7 notes this is largely related to social/legal restrictions for trans people, but it is worth providing information about how conditions have changed over the assessment period. Given the study’s focus on sexual minorities, I would encourage a brief discussion of pushback towards sexual minorities, in particular.
- Second, there is considerable psychological research examining the temporal dynamics of social change, social identification, and collective action, including research directly examining perceived declines: e.g., https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022108330986, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2008.00392.x, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.3037. There is also related research examining *anticipated* changes (e.g., https://doi.org/10.1348/014466602165054). The manuscript would benefit from further attention to this work and a discussion of the unique contributions of the present research.
- Related to the above, I understand (and share) the author(s) critique of the overreliance on cross-sectional and experimental work, but given the presented study utilises cross-sectional data, and the introduction does not synthesise the existing work on perceived social declines from related literature (e.g., relative deprivation, temporal orientation, etc.), this argument falls a bit short.

- Regarding the role of instability/stability in fostering group identification, I wonder if this would benefit from considering the combinations of characteristics required to elicit group identification—SIT positions the combination of instability, illegitimacy, and impermeability of group boundaries as the "ideal" conditions to elicit group identification. It may be that further contextualising the experience of LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. helps to explain why the author(s) think that both stability and instability are relevant here, as I'd argue that (until recently) the *positive* gains for LGBTQ+ people were reasonable stable, and the current climate marks a unique period of illegitimate discrimination, instability and uncertainty for the community.
- Finally, I think the author(s) need to be explicit about their focus on repeated cross-sectional data early on, as the initial framing of their study (and critiques of past literature) could imply studying how perceptions have changed within the same individuals. As a minor point, I would also suggest shifting away from the use of "buffering" to describe the effects of identification, given the study's focus on mediation.

**Methods and Results:**

- There is very little information provided about the samples, despite claims that the individual datasets vary (page 10). I would strongly encourage providing a summary of the demographics of each sample (perhaps in a Table) to allow readers to assess whether the samples are comparable. I can see from inspecting the survey and pooled data file that the author(s) collected specific information on people's sexual and gender identities. This information, in particular, is crucial given that the gains for LGBTQ+ rights prior to the assessment period largely benefited gay cisgender men (and to some extent, lesbian women), and the current attacks on LGBTQ+ rights largely target trans people and plurisexual people (a recent example is the removal of bisexual and trans people from the Stonewall monument…) Reporting a breakdown of sexual and gender identities in the sample would be helpful. I'd also recommend controlling for monosexual versus plurisexual identities in your analyses and testing for whether monosexual (versus plurisexual) people report more positive perceptions of social change.
- The coding of asexuality in the dataset is somewhat problematic to me — are these participants included in your analyses, as I can see they are not coded as "Not heterosexual" in the pooled file? Asexual people are part of the LGBTQ+ community and face considerable discrimination, so I would include them or, at the very least, check if there are differences when including these participants in the analyses.
- Related to the above, providing the code used to analyse the data would facilitate replication of the results.
- Page 9 "identification with the gay community" – do you mean LGBTQ+ community? More generally, there are a couple of instances where the

author(s) switch between gay, LGBTQ+, and queer – I'd encourage consistent use of one term for simplicity's sake.

- The measures use a mix of items focused on sexual minorities specifically versus the LGBTQ+ community more broadly. I don't necessarily think this is an issue, but I am curious about the choice of wording here.
- The claim "we observed consistently declining perceptions of positive social change" (page 11) needs softening, given the minimal change between 2019-2021.
- SEs and exact p-values should be reported where possible, and I'd encourage differentiating significance in Table 3 (beyond highlighting all those < .050).
- Some of the causal language throughout needs to be softened, given the reliance on cross-sectional data and the inability to examine whether perceived social decline predicts change in identification within individuals.

**Discussion**

- I would encourage the authors to discuss limits on generalisability, as well as the implications of these findings for LGBTQ+ movements in the current context of democratic backsliding. I'd argue these findings align well with recent increases in LGBTQ+ rights protests, for example.
- Have the author(s) considered the impacts of perceiving social decline in other nations? The plight of LGBTQ+ people in other nations contributes to LGBTQ+ people's perceptions of social decline, too. Disentangling perceived decline in one's own nation from general societal decline is perhaps worth exploring in future work, given that the measures used here ask about change in society more broadly.

I hope my comments are helpful as the author(s) further their research. Thank you again for the opportunity to review.

**Reviewer 2**

The manuscript titled "When it doesn't get better: Leaning into minoritized identity to brace for decline" presents a compelling and timely investigation into how sexual minority individuals respond to perceived social decline through increased identification with their community. The study is grounded in solid theoretical frameworks and leverages a unique longitudinal dataset spanning eight years. Below are detailed comments and suggestions for improvement:

1. The manuscript poses an interesting and timely research question about how sexual minority individuals respond to perceived social decline by leaning into their collective identity. It also draws on well-established theories such as social identity theory and the rejection-identification model, providing a strong conceptual foundation for the research. The idea that collective identity can serve as a psychological resource during periods of sociopolitical decline is both theoretically rich and socially relevant.

2. The manuscript does not offer a clear justification for selecting LGBTQ individuals as the focal population. While the relevance of identity processes within this group is well-established, the authors should explicitly articulate why this population was chosen over other minoritized groups. Is there something unique about the LGBTQ experience that makes it particularly suitable for examining the relationship between perceived social decline and identification?

3. Additionally, the manuscript would benefit from a more detailed account of the sociopolitical events and shifts in LGBTQ rights that occurred during the study period (2017–2025). The authors refer to this timeframe as one marked by "substantial global social change," yet no specific examples are provided to illustrate what these changes were, how they varied across regions, or why they are relevant to the study's framing. Including this context is essential for helping readers understand the significance of the observed trends.

4. Several key terms, such as identity vigilance and renewed vigour, are used without sufficient conceptual clarification. These constructs appear to be critical to the interpretation of the findings, and clearer definitions or operationalizations would enhance the reader's understanding of the study's background.

5. The manuscript lacks a clearly stated set of research objectives or hypotheses. Given the diversity of theoretical perspectives on whether optimistic or pessimistic perceptions of society are more activating of minority identity, the authors should articulate whether they considered competing hypotheses and how their study aims to adjudicate between them.

6. Several key constructs, such as self-definition, group-based affect, collective efficacy, preserve collective identity, and relinquish collective identity, are introduced and measured in the methods section without any prior mention or explanation in the introduction. This abrupt appearance makes it difficult to understand how these constructs fit into the study's conceptual framework or relate to the research question.

7. The internal consistency of the *relinquish collective identity* measure is notably low across all waves, with reported Cronbach's alpha values of .59, .65, .53, .60, and .57. These values fall below the commonly accepted threshold of .70, raising concerns about the reliability of this construct.

8. The research includes three experimental conditions (i.e., control, ingroup change, and outgroup change), but the manuscript does not provide a clear rationale for their inclusion or explain how they relate to the study's theoretical framework and research objectives. It is also unclear why participants were randomly assigned to these conditions, especially given the longitudinal nature of the dataset and the emphasis on naturally evolving perceptions of social change.

9. Moreover, the main text of the manuscript does not present any analysis comparing outcome variables across these experimental conditions. Without such analysis, the purpose and impact of the experimental manipulation remain ambiguous. If these conditions were intended to simulate different perceptions of social change or ingroup/outgroup perceptions, the authors should explicitly state

this and provide corresponding results. If not, the inclusion of experimental manipulation may need to be reconsidered or better justified.

10. The manuscript does not provide basic demographic details of the participants, which are essential for evaluating the generalizability and relevance of the findings. Since participants were recruited online via Prolific, the authors should report key demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, and country of residence.

11. Additionally, the sampling strategy across the five waves is unclear. Were participants followed longitudinally across timepoints, or were new samples recruited at each wave? If participants were tracked over time, the authors should report the attrition rate and describe how missing data were handled.

12. The manuscript presents data collected across five waves between 2017 and 2025, each situated within distinct political contexts in the United States. While this framing is potentially valuable, the rationale for the irregular timing of data collection is not explained. The intervals between waves vary significantly, from 2 years between Waves 1 and 2, to just 1 year between Waves 3 and 4, and nearly 3.5 years between Waves 4 and 5. The authors should clarify whether these timepoints were strategically selected to coincide with specific political events, and if so, how these events are theorized to influence the study's variables.

13. Additionally, the age range of participants varies across waves (e.g., 18–60 in Wave 1, 20–75 in Wave 2, 18–80 in Wave 5), raising questions about the inclusion criteria and sampling consistency. Were these differences intentional, and if so, what was the rationale? If not, how might they affect the comparability of data across waves?

14. The sample sizes across the five waves vary considerably, from n = 174 in Wave 1 to n = 992 in Wave 3, without any explanation provided. This inconsistency raises questions about the sampling strategy and whether the study was adequately powered to detect effects across all timepoints. The authors should clarify why sample sizes differ so substantially across waves and how sample size was determined.

15. The term Perceived Decline appears in the results table but is not clearly defined. Does it refer to declining perceptions of positive social change, or something else? Do higher scores indicate greater perceived decline or more optimism? Clarifying this is essential for interpreting the findings accurately.

16. Given the number of statistical tests conducted, the authors should address the risk of Type I error. It is recommended to apply a correction for multiple comparisons, or provide a rationale for why such corrections were not deemed necessary.

17. The manuscript does not clearly explain how data from the five timepoints were utilized in the analyses. It remains ambiguous whether the reported correlations were assessed cross-sectionally at each wave or longitudinally across waves. Similarly, the mediation analyses lack detail regarding the variables from which timepoints were included. The authors should clarify whether mediation models were tested using data from a single timepoint, pooled data, or lagged variables across time.

18. Rather than comparing mediation results between selected timepoints, the authors are encouraged to consider using linear mixed models or growth curve modeling. These approaches would allow for a more rigorous examination of how changes in perceived social conditions predict minority identification and outcome variables over time.

19. The manuscript repeatedly discusses the concept of leaning away from identity, including behaviors such as concealment, passing, and obscuring identity visibility, as part of the broader narrative. However, these behaviors were not measured or tested in the study. The authors should refrain from discussing unmeasured constructs as if they were part of the study's empirical contributions. If these ideas are intended to inform future research directions, they should be clearly framed as speculative, rather than interpretations of the current results.

20. Similar to the introduction, the discussion section lacks sufficient contextualization. Specifically, it does not engage with the lived experiences of LGBTQ populations or the sociopolitical shifts in the United States from 2017 to 2025. This omission is particularly concerning given the special issue's theme, "The Psychology of Pushback: Understanding Resistance and Compliance During Democratic Decline." To strengthen the discussion, the authors should situate and interpret the findings within the real-world political landscape, including the rise of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, policy rollbacks, and the broader climate of democratic decline. Without this context, the discussion risks appearing abstract and disconnected from the historical and political dynamics it seeks to explore.

21. Additionally, the manuscript does not include a critical reflection on its limitations. Key issues such as the use of online convenience sampling, potential biases in self-report measures, low internal consistency of certain scales (e.g., relinquish collective identity), and the irregular timing and composition of the longitudinal dataset should be acknowledged. Addressing these limitations would not only enhance transparency but also guide future research in this area.

22. The manuscript appears to focus primarily on cisgender sexual minority individuals, with no mention of transgender and gender-diverse populations throughout the introduction, methods, or discussion. This omission is particularly concerning given the study's temporal scope (2017–2025), a period marked by significant anti-trans movements, especially under the Trump administration, to exclude transgender individuals from public life, including healthcare, education, and military service. Trans communities have been at the forefront of resistance, and the exclusion of transgender and gender-diverse experiences represents a missed opportunity to engage with one of the most targeted and vulnerable groups during periods of democratic decline.

23. Furthermore, the discussion section lacks practical implications. The authors do not address how their findings could inform interventions, advocacy strategies, or policy development aimed at supporting sexual minority communities during periods of sociopolitical instability. Given the relevance of the study to real-world challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals, especially in politically volatile contexts, this omission limits the applied value of the research.

**Round 2**

**Editor Decision**

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting your revised manuscript, “When It Doesn’t Get Better: Leaning Into Minoritized Identity to Brace for Decline,” for further consideration in our special issue on The Psychology of Pushback. We solicited feedback from the same two experts who evaluated your initial submission, and we have also re-reviewed the paper ourselves.

We all agree that your manuscript has made a substantial leap forward. The introduction now lays out the contextual and theoretical background of your work much more convincingly. Furthermore, the methods are more transparent, and the results are communicated much more efficiently. While we acknowledge these significant improvements, we ask you to revise your manuscript once more to likely help bring it across the threshold we envision for this special issue.

Please address the remaining issues identified by both reviewers. The role of time is central to the rationale for your work, and there are some remaining issues, as noted by Reviewer 2, to address about this the effects of time.

Reviewer 2 reiterates a point we previously raised, which you felt did not align with your hypotheses. To quote our previous letter, we asked you to “investigate whether the correlates of perceived social decline change over time.” Reviewer 2 now states, “Given the substantial political and social changes between 2017 and 2025, it may be useful to consider whether the relationships between perceived possibility of progressive change, group identification, and the outcome variables differ across timepoints. Specifically, time could be considered as a moderator, testing whether associations among these variables may be stronger during periods “when things don’t just get better.” ” From our perspective, you are clearly interested in how perceived change relates to various mediators and outcome variables. However, it would be highly informative to know whether these correlations change significantly over time.

Reviewer 2 also requests further explanation about what the operational variable of Time in your analyses represents conceptually. We concur. Specifically, Reviewer 2 commented, “Including time as an exogenous variable is helpful, but the manuscript would benefit from a clearer explanation of what this variable actually represents. Also, when time is a significant predictor, how should that be interpreted? For instance, does a positive association indicate that respondents in later waves perceived greater progressive change? A brief conceptual explanation would make the temporal dynamics easier for readers to follow.”

Reviewer 1 highlights another key element of the manuscript – how the findings are illustrated in Figure 1 – that needs to be presented more clearly to make the meaning more accessible to readers. Reviewer 1 observes, “Figure 1 is quite difficult to interpret. It may help to change the format to colour-blind friendly/use different line

types, and to provide a key for abbreviations in the figure note (similar to Table 2)." In your revision, please either (1) revise Figure 1 to define all acronyms in the note, or strongly preferably (2) write out the construct names in the Figure legend instead of using multiple acronyms. The years legend and the variable legend are also awkwardly placed. Please improve the Figure generally; we expect it to be of great value to our readership, but its impact cannot be fully realized without these adjustments.

Thank you for addressing R2.16 regarding Type I error inflation in your response letter. Please incorporate this rationale directly into the main text rather than limiting it to the letter.

Similarly, you addressed the participant inclusion issue related to transgender individuals in your response. Please ensure this limitation is explicitly detailed in the discussion section.

Please add a sentence to the abstract describing the general time trends you observed. These trends represent a major finding and help contextualize the accompanying model results.

The structural equation modeling is a great step forward. However, because it relies on serial mediation, we suggest first testing and presenting in text and visually a model without mediation so readers can grasp the main effects, as Reviewer 2 also suggests.

While you touch upon data limitations in your discussion, we require a paragraph that explicitly addresses the limitations of the causal assumptions underlying the serial mediation model you tested. Please discuss alternative models and clarify that the assumed causal direction through two serial mediators remains theoretically plausible but empirically highly uncertain.

We understand that presenting exact *p*-values and 95% confidence intervals within the SEM figure would clutter the visualization. However, please provide a supplementary table presenting these statistics for all paths. You may use unstandardized coefficients if necessary. Please refer to this table in the main text so readers are informed.

As we are likely nearing acceptance of the paper, please save all figures as high-resolution, lossless SVG files and embed them as such in the manuscript. The files must be created and saved directly as SVG; converting them from a different file format is insufficient.

In line with Reviewer 2, we ask you to discuss the absence of socioeconomic status variables and nuanced sexual orientation and gender identification in your discussion section. Please also comment on the change in country of origin requirements between the first and second waves.

Please remove the causal speculation from the results section (p. 19, lines 6 through 14) and entirely avoid causal terminology elsewhere. For example, there is an abundance of causal claims starting on page 24, line 9, up to the discussion section. Furthermore, avoid causal speculations entirely in the discussion, as the serial mediation model provides very little basis for such claims (e.g., p. 25, lines 11 through 14).

In the SEM figure, it would be more intuitive to code the year contrast so that positive values indicate an *increase* in the perceived possibility of progressive change over time. Please implement this adjustment and update the corresponding indirect effects.

The formulation on page 27 is somewhat unclear: “might dispose people to pathways of response to devaluing circumstances”. Please revise this phrasing for clarity.

We aim to create coherence among the papers in this special issue by establishing connections between them. In terms of coping with democratic backsliding, the following paper has clear relevance: https://advances.in/psychology/10.56296/aip00051/. Additionally, this paper can help inform how exposure to shared discrimination can lead to solidarity: https://advances.in/psychology/10.56296/aip00045/.

We thank you for explicating the nature of your data at the end of the introduction in response to the reviewers’ comments. However, stating “Our eventual dataset was not longitudinal” seems excessive. The data are longitudinal at the sample level, even if not at the individual level. Rather than discarding the term “longitudinal” entirely, please clarify this distinction.

On page 15, line 15, please clarify for readers that the findings utilizing only the control groups were broadly the same, as you suggested in your response letter.

Please report the correlation between the two desire-to-preserve items in the methods.

STYLISTIC ISSUES

· Page 3, line 18: Please remove the extra “here”.

· Ensure all Latin statistical letters are italicized. For instance, there are still *ps* that are not italicized in the text and figure notes.

· On page 5, line 24, the term “artificially defined groups” does not accurately reflect the extensive literature that utilizes real-world groups and identities. Please rephrase this.

· In Table 1, please insert an equals sign after Range and Mdn. Additionally, present 95% confidence intervals instead of standard errors.

CONCLUSION

We believe this manuscript has moved much closer to acceptance for our special issue, and we look forward to receiving your revised version. We kindly ask that you submit the revision by May 2nd.

Best,

Jonas R. Kunst & John F. Dovidio

**Reviewer 1**

Thank you for the opportunity to review the revised manuscript, “When It Doesn’t Get Better: Leaning Into Minoritized Identity to Brace for Decline”. I appreciate the authors’ responsiveness to my and other review comments, and their clear explanations for why some revisions were not feasible or appropriate (e.g., comparisons across different sexuality groupings). I only have one **very** minor suggestion for revision: Figure 1 is quite difficult to interpret. It may help to change the format to colour-blind friendly/use different line types, and to provide a key for abbreviations in the figure note (similar to Table 2).

Congratulations to the authors on their important research – I look forward to seeing it published.

**Reviewer 2**

I appreciate the opportunity to review this revised manuscript. The authors have clearly taken the previous feedback seriously, and the revisions have made the manuscript more coherent and transparent overall. I have a few additional comments that I hope can help further strengthen the manuscript:

Including time as an exogenous variable is helpful, but the manuscript would benefit from a clearer explanation of what this variable actually represents. Also, when time

is a significant predictor, how should that be interpreted? For instance, does a positive association indicate that respondents in later waves perceived greater progressive change? A brief conceptual explanation would make the temporal dynamics easier for readers to follow.

At present, it is not clear whether the model estimates the direct paths from time to the outcome variables (positive emotion, negative emotion, group-based self-definition, group-based satisfaction, collective efficacy, and preserve identity). While the focus is understandably on indirect effects, knowing whether time directly predicts any of these outcomes would help readers understand the role that temporal shifts may play in the overall model.

The improved reporting of sample characteristics is appreciated. That said, the first wave differs quite markedly from the later ones in both sample size (n = 179 vs. 489–997) and the proportion of U.S. respondents (32% vs. 100%). Because the study is situated within a U.S. sociopolitical context, these discrepancies could meaningfully influence perceptions of social decline and collective identity. It would be helpful to explicitly acknowledge this as a limitation and discuss any implications for interpretation.

Given the substantial political and social changes between 2017 and 2025, it may be useful to consider whether the relationships between perceived possibility of progressive change, group identification, and the outcome variables differ across timepoints. Specifically, time could be considered as a moderator, testing whether associations among these variables may be stronger during periods “when things don’t just get better.” If the authors decide not to pursue this analysis, acknowledging the possibility would still enrich the discussion and point to meaningful future directions.